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Mil Estimates file

19 March 1971

MEMORANDUM TO THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Preparation of Military Estimates

Though the present cycle of military estimates is still a good way from completion, the time is already close at hand to begin on next year's papers. As to their format and content, we have been in contact with Mr. Carter of the White House Staff, who has undertaken to collect ideas and give them to us. We suggested various possibilities for the next II-8 and II-3: complete papers which would repeat most of what was in the last ones, with such revisions and additions as might be necessary; Memoranda to Holders which would confine themselves to such revisions and additions; or perhaps short texts consisting of new material, with the old set forth at length in Annexes. Carter has undertaken to let us know, in two weeks or so, which of these or other alternatives he and his colleagues would prefer. He hopes to get the views of Mr. Kissinger.

Meanwhile I would like to submit a few recommendations about the process of producing these estimates. We have conducted the business, during the past year, in general accord with your memorandum to me of May 4, 1970. Over the course of the year there has been a good deal of trial and error and of modification in procedures, as was to be expected. The papers are getting out, eventually, but they are inordinately delayed. In part this is because of their great length and complexity, but they take far longer than is justified by this factor. There have been some difficulties about the relationship between the Board and the task force set up to draft the papers, and about the place of the ONE Staff in the process. I believe that we can refine the procedures, reduce some of the confusion, and get the job done much more expeditiously next time.

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In your memorandum the Board, and especially the Board Chairman, was given continued responsibility "for producing a final Agency draft", and they took this responsibility seriously. Yet the "preparation and staffing" of what was initially interpreted to be the entire draft save for the Summary Conclusions was entrusted to analysts from the Directorates of Intelligence and of Science and Technology. (The ONE Staff was, at first, wholly excluded from the process.) The drafters felt some difficulty in deciding how far they were responsible to themselves, to their own superiors, or to the Board Chairman in matters relating to the structure and form of the paper. It would be well, I think, to reaffirm the clear responsibility of the Board and the Board Chairman in these matters.

Clearly it will continue to be essential that large parts of the estimates -- the descriptive, technical, and analytical parts -- be initially drafted by analysts from the Directorates. The device of a task force drawn from the Directorates is useful, partly because it facilitates arriving at a CIA position. Nevertheless, the procedure of this past cycle, in which the task force drafted the entire estimate and then, because the Board found the result inadequate, redrafted it sometimes two or three or more times, was unnecessarily wasteful of the time of all concerned. Moreover, the members of the task forces have other duties than drafting NIE's; they are sometimes called off for work on NSSM's or other matters to which they or their superiors give higher priority, and this contributes to delays. The ONE Staff is experienced in writing NIE's, and its time is at the disposal of the Board.

Some of these troubles can be taken care of, I believe, if when an estimate is begun the Board Chairman and the Board meet with members of the task force and of the ONE Staff to draw up Terms of Reference and determine in detail or in general how the paper is to be constructed. The Board Chairman should then assign initial drafting responsibility for sections of the paper to the task force, the ONE Staff, or others as may be appropriate. It might

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be useful if members of the ONE Staff could be members of the task force; at least they ought to be recognized in a function of liaison between the Board Chairman and the task force during the process of drafting.

When initial drafts have come in there is still a good deal of redrafting and modifying needed to produce a reasonably coherent and structured paper. This part of the task should be entrusted primarily to the Board Chairman and the ONE Staff. They would of course work with the advice and assistance of the task force, but the task force need not undertake all of the actual rewriting. I should observe in this connection that our working relationships with the working levels this past year have been generally very good.

Much of the process I have suggested above represents in fact what has been arrived at as we progressed through the various papers. I believe nevertheless that it would be desirable to formalize something along the line of these suggestions in another memorandum from you, to supersede and elaborate upon that of last year. I would be glad to draft such a memorandum if you wish. Meanwhile, however, some of these suggestions need further explanation, based upon a fuller account of how things have worked this year; I would like to talk about this to you at your convenience.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

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